

**ULI Chicago 8th Annual Vision Awards
July 10, 2019**



Project Finalist: Unity Temple Restoration

Project Team:

Developer: UTP, LLC

Restoration Architects: Harboe Architects, PC

Project Description:

Frank Lloyd Wright considered Unity Temple one of his greatest achievements, describing it as “my contribution to modern architecture.” It is an icon of 20th century modern architecture and holds universal value that best exemplifies Wright’s artistic genius and innovation of space, form, structure, technology and materials.

Unity Temple was designed in 1905 and completed in 1908 for the Unitarian Universalist congregation. The building is an early example of Wright’s concept of organic architecture, and is a radical departure from typologies of typical religious structures. His use of poured-in-place concrete both satisfied a small budget of \$45,000 (ultimately completed for \$80,000) and served as an innovative technique, influencing the future development of architectural design.

In 2000, Unity Temple was added to Landmarks Illinois’ most endangered list, and in 2009 the National Trust for Historic Preservation added Unity Temple to its list of most endangered places. These unfortunate designations spurred the Alphawood Foundation to pledge a generous \$10 million seed grant in 2013 to begin the restoration project, which ultimately cost \$25 million. The congregation raised an additional \$1.75 million, and Unity Temple Restoration Foundation (UTRF) raised \$3.25 million from the Tawani Foundation (\$1 million donation plus a \$1 million matching grant), Getty Foundation (\$200,000 for concrete restoration) and individual donors. The remaining \$10 million was covered by a bridge loan from Alphawood Foundation; UTRF is working closely with Alphawood to determine a long-term payment strategy while building a capital reserve fund for ongoing maintenance and future capital project needs.

In 2015, ownership of Unity Temple was transferred from the congregation to UTP, LLC, a limited liability corporation managed by a board of directors comprised of two members of the congregation and two members of the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation. The purpose of the new ownership structure is to ensure long-term preservation of Unity Temple while enabling ongoing use by the congregation.

Based on a comprehensive master plan developed by McClier Preservation Group, completed in 2006, the project addressed all aspects of building restoration and modern upgrades needed to safeguard the immediate and long-term viability and sustainability of the building’s exterior and interior components.

- Exterior scope: shotcrete repair, skylight replacement, new roofing and drainage systems, door and window restoration, landscaping and exterior lighting.
- Interior scope: restoration of historic plaster, repair/replacement of damaged non-original plaster, replication of original finishes, lighting upgrades, art glass restoration, wood door and trim restoration.
- New features were added including a state of the art catering kitchen and a geothermal heating and cooling system.

In 2018, Docomomo announced its Modernism in America Awards, acknowledging the highest level of restoration expertise and demonstration of creative and sensitive 21st century solutions; the Unity Temple restoration project was given a special award of restoration excellence. Chicago Tribune architecture critic, Blair Kamin, summed up the results of the restoration project as “an enduring statement of Wright’s genius and a vivid reminder that his brilliance extended far beyond Prairie Style houses for which he is best known.”